

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**Mitchell School District  
Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2005-2006**

**Team Members:** Chris Sargent, Donna Huber, Steve Gilles, Rita Pettigrew, Penny McCormick-Gilles, Barb Boltjes, Education Specialists, Bev Petersen, Transition Liaison, Julie Carpenter, Becky Cain and Linda Turner, Special Education Programs

**Dates of On Site Visit:** September 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005

**Date of Report:** November 9, 2005

---

This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by the Office of Special Education. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

<b>Promising Practice</b>	The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.
<b>Meets Requirements</b>	The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	The district/agency has met this requirement but has identified areas of weakness that left unaddressed may result in non-compliance.
<b>Out of Compliance</b>	The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement.
<b>Not applicable</b>	In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.

---

<b>Principle 1 – General Supervision</b>
--

General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

**Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

- Surveys from parents and school staff
- Mitchell Christian School and John Paul II Elementary School information
- Flow through funds request and budget information
- Home school student information
- Comprehensive plan

- Workshops and training
- District information – table A
- District staff information – table B
- Suspension and expulsion data – table C
- Assessment information – table D
- Enrollment information – table E
- Placement alternatives – table F

### **Promising practice**

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District has procedures in place that identify students with disabilities. Various student data including formal and informal assessments (SAT 10, Dakota STEP, DRA, DIBLES and reading inventories) are used in the referral process to review the student's ability. Each building uses a team approach to all referrals and evaluations. The district has developed more inclusive forms to assist in the referral process.

The district is implementing a pre-referral process through special education with the general education staff at each building. When a teacher requests assistance from the special education team, they complete a pre-referral form that contains evaluation information and modifications that have been implemented to assist a student prior to a referral to special education.

The district implements the Reading First curriculum at the elementary level. The elementary teachers are all trained in the AREA (Advanced Reading Enhancement Approach) reading training. At all levels, there is before and afterschool tutoring for students. There are programmed study halls available at the high school to assist students during school. In the summer, the elementary schools also implemented summer school for referred students.

The district also uses Infinite Campus, which is available to all educators in the district as well as parents. The parents are able to keep track of student performance using the parental portal through Infinite Campus. Infinite Campus has been upgraded and now all evaluation information completed at the state level is available to the educators for review.

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District provides special education services to eligible students in private schools. The special education process is the same for the privately placed students. The services are documented on an IEP or most recently developed Individual Service Plan. The plans are reviewed annually. All services, except for academic services, are provided at the private schools. In one case, all of a student's services are provided at the private school.

The steering committee has reviewed the placements of privately placed students out of district. In all cases the IEP was developed with the student's multidisciplinary team in attendance including a representative of the Mitchell School District.

The Mitchell School District steering committee concluded that students have reached a high standard of achievement by continually using data to drive decision making in revising student programs to reach AYP for the spring 2005 statewide testing. This year the district will also be assessing 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades to continue adding data to review the support decisions that increase student achievement.

The district has assessed students at nearly 100% for all grades assessed during the 2003 school year for students with disabilities. Seventeen students participated in the STAARS assessment in 2004. Teams are becoming more familiar with using the STAARS assessments to determine which assessment is appropriate for a student.

The dropout rate for students with disabilities has decreased over the last 4 years from a high of 23.81% to 2.63%. Individual programs need to continue to be experimented with so the dropout rate for students with disabilities continues to decrease.

Several students with disabilities have graduated with a diploma. Other students have reached the maximum age. The district continues to work with students to achieve graduation status.

The district steering committee reported that each building special education team reviews the discipline data on an individual and group basis and revises plans to accommodate those students who are in jeopardy of being suspended or expelled. The administrators use the provided charts all year to keep current with all students' suspension and expulsion activity. This provides the team with information as to how many days a student accumulates. Team meetings are held when students are expelled to assist the student with continued progress in the curricular areas.

The Mitchell School District steering committee reviewed the qualifications of the staff employed and/or contracted by the district. All of the staff is fully certified and all but a few of the middle school and high school special education teachers have met the highly qualified status as now required. The district will be reviewing the steps to have all special education teachers highly qualified to teach in their assigned area.

The steering committee reported that the district has procedures to determine professional development for the hired personnel. The district endorses the training of the DOE through the ESA 3 and participates in all the training opportunities. The train the trainer model has been used extensively by the district and has been well received.

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee concluded that the district works with all the agencies in the community to provide child find services. The district has procedures in place that are used for the child find process.

The district meets the requirements for serving students with disabilities of the private schools in the district and meets the state and federal guidelines for placing students in out of district placements. The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District follows procedures for placing students in an interim alternative educational setting.

Up to the current school year, the Mitchell School District has employed all fully qualified special education personnel and the district has procedures for implementing personnel development.

### **Needs Improvement:**

The steering committee reported that the pre-referral process is in need of improvement. Since adopting the "Teacher Request for Assistance" form in February of 2005 the referrals have been more inclusive of a student's abilities. It also gives the teachers several ideas of modifications and accommodations that can be used prior to a referral. The district TAT teams are not always used prior to special education referrals.

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District needs to work on improving the students with disabilities dropout rate. It also needs to clearly document on Infinite Campus how a student with disabilities leaves the district. It is felt that when students reach maximum age or relocate, they might be coded incorrectly and considered into the dropout rate.

The district will need to take measures to ensure that all middle school and high school certified teachers are highly qualified by the end of the school year.

### **Validation Results**

#### **Promising practice**

The Reading First grant that the Mitchell School District received provides early elementary teachers with training in the Advanced Reading Enhancement Approach (AREA) to teach reading. All teachers, including those who teach special education are trained and a "common language" is used with all students. Information from the DIBLES is used as a means to focus on the individual needs of students. The curriculum must be based on research, approved by the state and be linked back to the five key

components of early reading. Both the principal and the Reading First coach at L.B. Williams School reported that reading scores have improved and data is available to validate their conclusions.

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirements under general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

### **Needs improvement**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as needing improvement under general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

### **Out of compliance**

#### **ARSD 24:05:22:03. Certified child**

A certified child is a child in need of special education or special education and related services who has received a multidisciplinary evaluation and has an individual education program formulated and approved by a local placement committee. Documentation supporting a child's disabling condition as defined by Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act must be maintained by the school district for verification of its annual federal child count. This definition applies to all eligible children ages 3 to 21, inclusive, and to only those children under the age of 3 who are in need of prolonged assistance.

The review team identified the following issues:

1. An evaluation conducted in February of 2004 did not yield sufficient data to support the placement of this student under the eligibility category of Autism. The Gilliam Rating Scale (GARS) rated the student in a “below average probability” of Autism. An outside evaluator reviewed the students record and reported on April 23, 2004 that, “educational needs would be understood and addressed as a manifestation of a diagnosis of an Autistic Disorder. This student does not meet the South Dakota eligibility criteria as a student with autism.”
2. The review of a student’s record in April of 2004 resulted in a diagnosis of Autism. The record did not include evaluation data sufficient to support this diagnosis. There was no evidence standardized Autism evaluations had been conducted. The student was placed on the 2004 child count as a student with Autism.
3. The Gilliam Rating Scale was administered for another student identified as Autistic on the 2004 child count. The report indicated “the probability of Autism is in the below average range correspondence to the diagnostic criteria for Autism Disorder”. In April of 2004, a review of the file was conducted by an outside evaluator. The evaluation reports do not support the South Dakota eligibility criteria for a student with Autism. The student was placed on the 2004 child count as a student with Autism.
4. An evaluation conducted for another student resulted in identification and placement of the student on the 2004 child count as orthopedically impaired. The evaluation data does not support educational impact and the program only requires assignment completion and organizing a planner. Also, evaluation data does not support the criteria for occupational therapy services.
5. An evaluation conducted with a student in 2002 does not support the disability determination of Other Health Impaired. There was no evidence of ability or documentation of the chronic or acute health problem. This student may be eligible under another disability category.
6. An evaluation conducted in 2002 did not provide sufficient medical data to support the eligibility category of Other Health Impaired. This student may be eligible under another disability category.

## **Principle 2 – Free Appropriate Public Education**

All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to

children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

- Surveys from parents and school staff
- Mitchell Christian School and John Paul II Elementary School information
- Budget information
- Home school student information
- Comprehensive plan
- Workshops and training
- District information – table A
- District staff information – table B
- Suspension and expulsion data – table C
- Assessment information – table D
- Enrollment information – table E
- Placement alternatives – table F
- Disabling conditions – table G
- Exiting data – table H
- Data by age and placement alternative – table I
- Early intervention (Part C) exit information – table K
- Complaint information – table L
- Monitoring information – table N
- Child count information
- Referrals
- File reviews
- Infinite Campus information (SIMS)
- IEP information
- District forms
- Employee handbook
- Board policies

### **Promising practice**

The steering committee reports that the Mitchell School District has many programs in place for students in providing FAPE including: Boys Town Classroom Social Skills, Character Counts, Stop and Think, School Resource Officers, Prevention Specialist, Alternative High School, Saturday School, Before and After School Tutoring, Summer School and referrals to agencies in the community when necessary.

The steering committee reported that the building administrators are aware of the procedures when considering a removal of students with disabilities. Case facilitators are made aware of any removals of students through email and Infinite Campus on a regular basis. Documentation of removals is completed by building administrators on an ongoing annual basis. The removal documents are forwarded to the special education office for SEP reporting.

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District provides a free appropriate public education to all eligible children with disabilities across the public, private and residential settings. The district uses a continuum of alternative placements to provide an individualized educational program for students with disabilities.

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District is in compliance with suspensions and expulsions of students with disabilities.

#### **Needs improvement**

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District could benefit from more opportunities for students so students aren't in out of school suspension.

### **Validation Results**

#### **Promising practice**

The "Before and After School Tutor Program" at L.B. Williams and Longfellow Elementary Schools is recognized as a promising practice by the review team. The school offers tutoring sessions to strengthen children's reading and math skill. The sessions are intended to raise their state standard scores to a proficient level. District data indicates the program has been a success.

#### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirements under free appropriate public education as concluded by the steering committee.

#### **Needs improvement**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as needing improvement under free appropriate public education as concluded by the steering committee

### **Principle 3 – Appropriate Evaluation**

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

- Teacher file reviews
- Student files
- Surveys
- General curriculum information
- Special education log
- Infinite Campus information
- Budget information
- Home school student information
- Comprehensive plan
- Workshops and training
- Personnel summary – table B
- Disabling conditions – table G
- Exiting data – table H
- Data by age and placement alternative – table I
- Data by disabling condition and placement alternative – table J

- Early intervention (Part C) exit information – table K
- Complaint information – table L
- Monitoring information – table N
- Referrals
- IEP information
- District evaluations
- Out of district evaluation agencies
- Interpreters/signers used in the district

### **Promising practice**

The steering committee concluded that parents are actively involved in the evaluation process in identifying students with disabilities and give consent. Parental input is received on the evaluation areas. Parents are asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their child. Most of the questionnaires are returned promptly. The case facilitators work with parents to meet at their convenience and on several occasions have traveled to homes or workplaces of parents to keep them informed and involved in their child's educational needs. In some instances, district staff and translation websites have been used to translate information from English to Spanish.

Functional assessment information is obtained from both the general education and special education staff during the referral in student information gathering process. New forms have been developed and adopted by the special education team to aid in gathering more academic information to adequately choose evaluation areas, determining eligibility and writing IEPs. The district gathers past evaluation information in addition to guided reading information, CCC scores, Reading Recovery information and classroom performance across all disciplines. Consent is obtained for both new evaluations and reevaluations in most every case. Transitions surveys and assessments often are given at age 14 for students to aid in course selection at the high school level. Evaluations are current in the district and administered by qualified personnel. Case facilitators provide evaluation reports to parents prior to the initial eligibility placement committee meeting. For limited English proficient students and parents, various sources provide assistance to translate special education information to parents and students for better communication. The district has one parent that needs a sign language interpreter for his child's meetings. Currently there are no parents that require Braille text; however the district employs a Brailist.

The steering committee reported that the district receives referrals throughout the school year. Parents report that the teachers have assisted their child through various instructional strategies before special education was considered. Evaluation areas are reviewed with team members including the parents. Evaluations are conducted in a timely manner. Since January 2005 the director has reviewed the evaluation reports of students that have been in an initial evaluation or reevaluation and the reports have contained functional assessment information. MDT eligibility reports contain all required information and include all team members. Parents surveyed stated that they understand evaluation information and receive copies of the reports. Parents also report that the evaluation information has been used in developing their child's IEP.

The steering committee concluded that the students in the Mitchell School District have reevaluations every 3 years to determine eligibility. It is the practice of the district to reevaluate all students prior to dismissing them from special education and/or related services. Forms are used in the district to determine the dismissal which the parents sign as well as team members. There have been instances when parents decline the special education services prior to the reevaluation. When parents decline the services they attend a team meeting and sign off.

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee reported that the Mitchell School District provides appropriate written notice and obtains consent prior to administration of assessments. The district is using reevaluations and assessments appropriately.

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District meets the requirements of Independent Education Evaluations and reevaluations are completed every 3 years and before dismissing from special education or a related service.

### **Needs improvement**

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District could improve and reviewing the past evaluations and use them to assist in determining if a reevaluation is necessary. Since January 2005 the district has improved on the use of functional assessments but needs to continue to complete them on all students during the evaluation process. The steering committee also concluded that functional assessments have been completed in the past but have not always been appropriately documented.

The steering committee concluded that the district could improve on obtaining medical records to document medical conditions that affect a student's learning. The district has improved however information is still lacking for some cases of ADHD.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising practice**

The monitoring team recognizes technology in the classroom as an area of promising practice. The district participated in a "train the training model" provided through Dell computers and the One to One Laptop Initiative grant. Potential trainers attended one week of intensive training. After becoming certified trainers, these individuals taught the remaining district staff during a two week session in the summer. Attendees were provided activities, ideas and strategies concerning using computers in the classroom to enhance learning. An informal needs assessment will be conducted later this year to help determine additional areas of need concerning technology in the classroom. Addition training will be provided based upon this information.

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees the district provides appropriate written notice and obtains consent prior to administration of assessments. The district meets the requirements of Independent Education Evaluations and reevaluations are completed every 3 years.

### **Needs improvement**

The monitoring team determined the district needs to ensure that evaluation procedures are consistently followed when students are dismissed from a related service or from special education. Evaluation to determine continued eligibility did not occur for two students receiving speech as a related service.

### **Out of compliance**

#### **ARSD 24:05:25:04. Evaluation procedures**

School districts shall ensure, at a minimum, that evaluation procedures include the following:

- (5) A variety of assessment tools and strategies are used to gather relevant functional and development information about the child, including information provided by the parents that may assist in determining:
  - (a) Whether the child is a child with a disability; and
  - (b) The content of the child's IEP.



Through a review of 20 student files the monitoring team found functional assessment was not available to develop the IEP, information from the functional assessment did not include skills needed to develop annual goals or was taken from standardized testing used to determine eligibility.

## **Principle 4 – Procedural Safeguards**

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

- Complaints – table L
- Teacher file reviews
- Surveys
- Comprehensive plan
- Parental rights booklet
- Consent and prior notice forms
- FERPA disclosure
- Personnel training
- Budget information
- Surrogate parent information
- IEPs
- Employee handbook
- Board policies

### **Promising practice**

The steering committee concluded the district uses various resources to provide parents their written rights: translation website, school personnel and community translators. At meetings of initial placement, the parental rights are reviewed verbally and parents are asked if there are any questions. Rights booklets are given at every IEP meeting. Based upon parent statements at meetings and their refusal to take another rights booklet, it is obvious that parents have received their rights numerous times. Rights booklets are updated in accordance with the SEP. Surrogate parents are in place in the Mitchell School District. Administrators and case facilitators have been informed of the issue of using surrogate parents.

The steering committee reported that the district affords parents the right to inspect and review the educational records of their child. Administrators arrange the meeting time and review the records with them. The district does have one family that at least annually makes this request. The district has not had a complaint to SEP or hearing in many years, if ever. Parental rights are given to parents of children with disabilities throughout the school year. Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) information is given in written form to each family in the district. A district social worker, prevention specialist or student resource officer serves as liaison between the school and parents when necessary. No due process hearings have been held in many years. Parents have requested the use of an advocate for their child through South Dakota Advocacy Services.

### **Meets requirements**

The district steering committee concluded that up until July 1, 2005 the district was in compliance with parental rights. The Mitchell School District meets the requirements of providing parental rights information to parents and meets the requirements for protecting the rights of a child with a disability.

The Mitchell School District meets the requirements of parental rights to inspect and review educational records, responding to complaint actions and due process hearing.

#### **Needs improvement**

The steering committee concludes the new rights booklet will need to be dispersed to all parents when available through SEP. It is anticipated that all parents will be given a rights booklet as soon as they are available through meetings and parent/teacher conferences.

### **Validation Results**

#### **Promising practice**

The monitoring team could validate the areas identified as promising practices under procedural safeguards as concluded by the steering committee.

#### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirements under general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

#### **Needs improvement**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as needing improvement under general supervision as concluded by the steering committee. Through interview, the updated parental rights information will be provided to parents at the time of their child's annual review. Parental rights will also be provided at other times when required.

## **Principle 5 – Individualized Education Program**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

- Early intervention (Part C) exit information – table K
- Complaints – table L
- Monitoring – table N
- Teacher file reviews
- Surveys
- Comprehensive plan
- IEP information
- Personnel training
- Budget information
- Employee handbook
- Curriculum information
- Board policies

**Promising practice**

The steering committee concluded that the high school has created several lists regarding transition information which is used in inviting agencies to IEP meetings. High school students most often attend their IEP meetings. The middle school and high school teachers have begun completing transition surveys in various classes and are used for information as part of the student's IEP input. Infinite Campus provides current grades and course information and is used by the case facilitators to enable the inviting of all necessary parties. The high school teachers use forms to distribute prior to IEP meetings to obtain current progress reports in all enrolled classes.

At the middle school level a modification/accommodation document has been made and given to all teachers in the general education curricular areas for quick reference against their class lists. At the high school level, binders which contain the actual IEP pages containing modification/accommodation information of students are given to each general education teacher. The middle school document and high school binders are updated as IEP meetings are held so they remain current. General education teachers that are responsible for monitoring goals and objectives are given copies of the students' IEPs. Updated case facilitator lists are dispersed at the middle and high school level almost weekly so general education teachers have contact with a special education teacher, which knows the students with disabilities more thoroughly. At the high school level, Student Responsibility Block enables teachers to work with other teachers to offer support in a specific curricular area. Special education logs are generated by the special education office and sent to the buildings annually. The logs list the students by annual review date. This list is sent to the team leader in the building to share with others.

The steering committee reported the IEP form has been revised in certain areas to assist with completing all the necessary components. The IEP form is reviewed annually for improvements. The middle school and high school teachers have begun completing transition surveys in various classes and are used for information as part of the student's IEP input. The high school teachers include a current schedule which is available through Infinite Campus to update actual courses of study. Student transcripts are available through Infinite Campus and are included in the high school IEP transition information so progress toward graduation requirements is reviewed annually. The district also developed a transfer of rights document that students sign to document the transfer of rights and is kept as part of the IEP document when reviewed.

Laptops have been purchased for all special education teachers for assistance in completing special education paperwork on computer documents. Most often the word template is used; however the steering committee noted that the Infinite Campus IEP is also being accessed by approximately 4 or 5 teachers on a regular basis. All the templates contain added information so that all components are included within special education paperwork. Department meetings provide opportunities for continued training on components of the IEP. Several memos are distributed when IEPs are audited at random to note areas of weakness.

The district uses a variety of creative practices to maintain a least restrictive environment. Elementary students participate daily in CCC for reading and math which is a computer program based on individual ability with their peers. Gertie Bell Rogers (GBR) Elementary students also participate in Boost Up activities with their peers and individually. Paraprofessionals and special education teachers are used in the general classroom as often as possible. At the high school level, all students are assigned to an SRB with a high school teacher, which remains the same for all four years of high school, that is randomly chosen. Before and after school tutors are available at all buildings across the district which works with all students.

The steering committee reported that high school teachers include a current schedule which is available through Infinite Campus to update actual courses of study. Student transcripts are available through Infinite Campus and are included in the high school IEP transition information so progress toward

graduation requirements is reviewed annually. Annual surveys are completed and included as student input into the IEP. High school students almost always attend their IEP meeting and provide input throughout the meeting.

High school special education teachers have attended Ed O'Leary Transition Workshops. They also work individually with the Transition Specialist, Bev Petersen, on a small group basis. A master file has been put together by the high school special education staff for suggestions for transition activities for the community for all IEP teams to use. Several transition assessments and surveys have been gathered to use for varying levels of student abilities.

The high school implemented special education classes such as Employability, Transition and Work Experience which focus on transition to adulthood. There are also several general education classes such as World of Work, Auto Mechanics, Woodworking, Horticulture, FACS and other electives that provide hands on experiences.

The steering committee reported that the district has been involved in curriculum mapping at all grade levels, developing improvement plans for NCLB accountability and updating curriculum to meet individual needs. The district also offers several opportunities in the educational setting such as tutoring, CCC, guided reading and reading first curriculum. Infinite Campus provides a detailed view of specific standards that are weak. The district also adopts new curriculum on a rotating basis. In the last 4 years, both the reading and math curriculum have been reviewed and new materials updated.

### **Meets requirements**

The district steering committee concluded that the prior notice contains all of the necessary information. IEP teams are complete at all levels and provide input to the development of IEP goals and objectives. The district staff survey reflects that the special education staff is available for ongoing communication regarding students with disabilities. The Mitchell School District has policies and procedures in place for ensuring an eligible student is on an IEP and receiving services

### **Needs improvement**

The district steering committee concluded that the student should be invited to all IEP meetings at the middle and high school level. The district has greatly improved on inviting outside agencies and needs to continue to do so for upperclassmen. Timelines are usually followed but dates need to be adhered to when providing evaluations, eligibility and initial placement meetings and annual review meetings.

The steering committee concluded that while the form contains all the necessary information, improvements can be made in the present levels of performance to make sure all areas are addressed. Another area of improvement is to include the necessary behavioral supports to students with behavior issues.

The steering committee concluded that 100% of student files need to include transition services appropriate to individual student needs for a student reaching 16 years of age and student files need an IEP that is reviewed annually.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising practice**

Students at Gertie Belle Rogers Elementary School (GBR) participate in Boost Up which is "a program combining physical and classroom activities that help students develop many of the readiness skills they need for academic success." Its purpose is to stimulate the brain stem through activities that are implemented in a variety of settings: in the classroom, during physical education, in the Boost-Up room,

during guidance, on the playground and “morning spins.” In addition, there are classroom activities such as a kinesthetic means of learning spelling words (Rainbow tracing).

Initially, a piton program was begun involving special education students at GBR (20 minutes per day plus time during physical education). Later it was expanded to all students (at least 5 minutes per day plus 20 to 30 minutes 2 times a week). In order to gauge effectiveness of the program, data is collected on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, two of GBR special education teachers are writing research papers about the Boost-Up program for their master’s degree program.

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirement under individual education program as concluded by the steering committee.

### **Needs improvement**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as needing improvement under individual education program as concluded by the steering committee.

The monitoring team reviewed several statements justifying placement for students. The justification did not adequately address the instructional needs of the student resulting in the removal from the general education program and the students typical peer group.

### **Out of compliance**

#### **ARSD 24:05:27:01.03. Content of individualized education program**

Each student's individualized education program shall include:

- (1) A statement of the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including:
  - (a) How the student's disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for non-disabled students); or
  - (b) For preschool student, as appropriate, how the disability affects the student's participation in appropriate activities;
- (2) A statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to:
  - (a) Meeting the student's needs that result from the student's disability to enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum; and
  - (b) Meeting each of the student's other educational needs that result from the student's disability.
- 3) A statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided to the student, or on behalf of the student, and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the student:
  - (a) To advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;
  - (b) To be involved and progress in the general education curriculum in accordance with this section and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and

The monitoring team reviewed the IEPs for six other students. The programs for these students have not been developed to confer benefit to the student and enable the student to be involved and progress in the general curriculum. For example:

1. The IEP for a student identified as other health impaired due to attention deficit disorder did not address how the student’s behavior impacted education. The only goal for this student was to complete assignment with a “C” or better.

2. The IEP for a student identified as learning disabled in the areas of reading, listening comprehension and written expression only contained a goal to write effectively for different audiences.
3. The IEP for a student identified as leaning disabled in the area of math. Special education services to be provided states “goals and objectives will be monitored by the regular classroom teachers and special services. Time=0 minutes.”

**ARSD 24:05:27:01.03. Content of individualized education program**

Each student's individualized education program shall include:

- (4) An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with non-disabled students in the regular class and in activities described in this section.

Through a review of 17 student records, the justification for placement did not include an explanation of why the student could not participate with his non-disabled peers. For example, “we accept placement in the general classroom”.

<b>Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment</b>
--

After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

**Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

- District staff information – table B
- Enrollment information – table E
- Placement alternatives – table F
- Disabling conditions – table G
- Placement by age – table I
- Placement by disabling condition – table J
- Complaints – table L
- Monitoring – table N
- File reviews
- Surveys
- General curriculum information
- Budget information
- Workshops and training
- Child count

**Promising practice**

The steering committee reported that the inclusion of students in the general education setting is supported with collaboration between special education and general education teachers. Paraprofessionals offer assistance in the CCC labs when students are working on computerized reading and math skills at their individual level. All kindergartens in Mitchell are full day. There are three registered nurses that cover the district. Class sizes are closely monitored in the primary grades so the teachers are allowed more individual student attention.

The district steering committee is anticipating that the new Teacher Request for Assistance serves as a written list of accommodations and modification that can be used prior to a referral to special education. The existing teacher assistance teams were not offering immediate assistance to teachers. The special education departments in each building also have a publication that contains hundreds of ideas for students with difficulties in specific areas including academic and behavior.

Recently the special education early childhood program relocated to an elementary school from its inclusive Head Start setting. This was due to the building facility not accommodating the needs of students because of the environment conditions (high noise level, poor acoustics, inadequate space, a high number of children being served in one large room and the high ratio of autistic children with sensory needs that were unable to be addressed). The early childhood program is building relationships with the Bergendergarten teacher and students so an inclusive setting is again achieved.

The district steering committee understands the time commitment for adapting curriculum for students with disabilities especially with the impacts of NCLB, new curriculum adoptions, state initiatives and district initiatives/goals that are also require much of their time. The middle school uses time each week to meet as a team and a special education teacher is part of the general education team.

#### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee concluded that the Mitchell School District meets the requirements of least restrictive environment.

### **Validation Results**

#### **Promising practice**

The monitoring team recognizes the Second Chance Program as an area of promising practice for the district. This program received an award for outstanding program in South Dakota for 2004-05. The program is designed to give students who struggle academically and behaviorally a setting in which they can be successful. Unlike other alternative program, the Second Chance Program does not isolate students in a separate building but gives them opportunities to reintegrate with their peers by taking classes at the high school or Mitchell Technical Institute. This program is available to all students by qualifying through a screening process and is believed to decrease drop-out rates in the district.

#### **Meets Requirement**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirements under least restrictive environment as concluded by the steering committee.